Driving Agricultural Innovations in Zimbabwe

FAO Emergency Rehabilitation and Coordination Unit (ERCU)

This brief presents an overview of the latest innovations being implemented by FAO's Emergency Rehabilitation and Coordination Unit (ERCU) in Zimbabwe between 2009 and 2011. Lessons learned from these projects are being used to inform decisions about the best approach for scaling up in the 2011/12 season as part of FAO's mandate to promote new and efficient technologies.

Voucher systems for agricultural input support

The positive improvements in Zimbabwe's macro-economic environment have set the stage for moving away from large scale, free input distribution programmes towards more market-based interventions. This is reflected in the introduction of the voucher system for agricultural input support, which seeks to **(1)** give farmers the opportunity to choose the agricultural inputs they need **(2)** test an alternative method of input assistance **(3)** demonstrate the capacity of communal farmers to contribute financially to the inputs received and therefore present an argument to gradually move away from free input distributions **(4)** Keep promoting the re-establishment of wholesalers to agro-dealers linkages, lost as a result of economic meltdown.

Electronic scratch card vouchers

- The project was implemented in Goromonzi district in Mashonaland East Province, with 1,000 farmers participating
- Each farmer received open scratch card vouchers, redeemable for preferred agricultural inputs from selected agro-dealers
- Each voucher had a value of USD 75, of which participants contributed USD 15 of their own money
- Mobile phones were used to validate beneficiary details and to process the transaction at the point of redemption
- The card cannot be forged and is similar to mobile phone airtime recharge cards used extensively in Zimbabwe, hence it is easy for the farmers to use
- Some of the shortcomings of the electronic scratch cards are the system is constrained to areas with good mobile phone network. It is very cumbersome for the agro-dealer to install the scratch card number into the mobile phone. Agro-dealers often installed the numbers after hours taking away the "instant transaction" advantage.

Electronic swipe card vouchers

- In Chegutu district of Mashonaland West Province, 1,000 farmers received electronic swipe cards that were redeemable for agricultural inputs at selected agro-dealers using Point of Sale machines (POS)
- Each electronic swipe card had a value of USD 90, to which participants contributed USD 15 of their own resources. The card is activated by a secret PIN code, so that only the eligible farmer can use the card
- For the agro-dealer it meant instant payment and easy redemption. Wholesalers were able to download the daily transactions and stock draw downs
- The system records all transactions showing quantity and type of inputs purchased, which can be used for monitoring and evaluation. It is cost effective compared to alternative electronic systems. The major challenge is that the system is constrained to areas with good mobile phone network
- Although not yet tested the use of smart cards provides an opportunity for electronic vouchers to be used in areas where cell phone network coverage is poor or nonexistent.

Rural Agro-dealers Restocking Programme (RARP)

Main impact: Re-establishing links between wholesalers and agro-dealers in rural areas of Zimbabwe.

Wholesalers are provided with insurance cover on agricultural inputs delivered to agro-dealers as consignment. Insurance mitigates against all risks on the part of the wholesaler. It is therefore an incentive for wholesalers to stock rural stores bringing inputs closer to farmers.

- FAO facilitated the provision of technical training for agro-dealers so as to further strengthen relationships between agro-dealers and wholesalers
- The programme was piloted in 2009 and illustrated the significant potential of insurance to leverage private sector investments. Insurance premiums costing USD 100,000 resulted in the distribution of inputs valued at nearly USD 540,000
- In 2010 more than 700 agro-dealers were restocked with inputs. Insurance premiums costing USD 130,000 resulted in the distribution of inputs valued at over USD 3 million
- Through the programme, agro-dealers were reintroduced into the market economy and shop owners were able to stock more agricultural inputs than would have otherwise been possible under the current micro economic environment

Community Based Vaccinators (CBVs)

Main impact: Empowerment of over 51,000 Community Based Vaccinators (CBVs) with knowledge, skills and resources to contain disease outbreaks and stop the spread through conducting mass vaccinations and awareness campaigns. This concept is both **sustainable** and **cost-effective.**

Up to 90 percent of rural communities own and derive their livelihoods from poultry production. However, many farmers face the challenge of outbreaks of diseases especially New Castle. Zimbabwe's Division of Veterinary Services (DVS) aims to eradicate Newcastle disease in the country, but is hampered by a critical shortage of resources (manpower, vaccines, fuel and daily subsistence allowances for its field staff).

- Close to 900,000 rural households (82 percent) in all 60 districts benefitted; and 8.5 million rural chickens nationwide were vaccinated
- CBVs were responsible for the vaccinations under the supervision of field staff from the DVS
- Awareness raising and passive surveillance for Newcastle disease and avian influenza were carried out at the same time as the Newcastle disease vaccinations
- Vaccines were produced by the DVS with support from FAO

Improving fodder production to increase milk output

This project has been introduced in Wedza district of Mashonaland East Province, to show the impact of improved fodder production on milk output levels among members of small-scale dairy associations.

The project is on-going, and an assessment is due during the dry season.

- Soil tests were carried out on each of the participating farmers' fields to determine the fertilizer requirements and lime application rates to correct the soil pH and ensure optimum conditions for silage production
- 26 communal farmers received inputs to grow maize for silage and meet the feed requirements of their dairy herd during the dry season Farmers are also growing bana grass as a supplement source of maize silage
- The farmers were required to repay the value of inputs through milk deliveries to the Dairy Association. The repayments feed into the local Dairy Association's revolving fund that will provide more farmers with inputs for improved fodder production

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